First Day of Class

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Introduction

Whether you are preparing to teach your first or fifty-first course, preparing for the first class meeting is exciting and should involve some deliberate planning. More than just "syllabus day", the first day can be considered one of the most important days of the semester. This day is an excellent chance to set the tone, get to know students, provide an opportunity for students to get to know each other, and articulate course expectations. This is a day to show great enthusiasm and establish a professional, respectful, and scholarly rapport with your students. The goal for the first day is to create an inviting classroom and a set the stage to co-create a meaningful learning experience for students and the instructor. Four words to remember for the first class: Enthusiasm, Expectations, Engagement, Rapport.

There are several research-based resources that include topics such as orchestrating positive first impressions and suggestions on creating excitement and getting students invested in course content. Pintrich (2004) encourages an approach to the first class that incorporates principles of self-regulated learning right from the start. Consider a pre-course content assessment so that you can dispel misconceptions about the content of your course (Bain, 2004). A first day that involves more than explaining the syllabus and course policies can have greater long-term benefits (Bennett, 2004; Hermann and Foster, 2008; Anderson, Mcguire, & Cory, 2011).

Implementation

- Introduce yourself to your students.
    - If class size is amenable, have students introduce themselves or another student to the class. Write what you can about each student from the introductions.
    - If you are teaching a large class, provide students opportunity to write their own introduction on paper to leave at end of class. Additionally, a Learning Management System (e.g., Blackboard Learn) may be utilized to begin a discussion board for introductions.
- Know the classroom technology.
- Articulate the goals of the course.
    - Be succinct, and refer students to the syllabus for more details.
- Articulate expectations.
    - Mirror what is in your syllabus regarding grading, attendance, participation, late and missed assignments, group work, class and/or online etiquette.
    - Explain expectations for in-class time as well as expectations for outside of class time.
    - The more clarity up front, the better.

- Establish a discussion safe environment and spell out the rules/guidelines for discussions.
- Articulate your preferred method of communication (university email; LMS email)
- Encourage students to meet with you during office hours.
- Direct students to ADA information on your syllabus.
- It does not have to be all bureaucratic the first day - teach something the first day! Make it current, make it exciting, make the topic relevant to them!

Frequently Asked Questions

- I would like to know the students' motivation for taking the course so I may add or shift certain concepts covered. How can I assess this?
    - Ask students to write 1-2 sentences why they are taking the course and how this course will help them reach their academic or career goals. This can be done anonymously and handed in at end of the first class.

- I would like informal as well as formal feedback from students regarding their perceptions of the course from time to time. How do I encourage students to provide feedback?
    - Establish an environment of feedback (both ways) on the first day. Describe your assessment techniques as well as describing how students will assess your teaching throughout the semester.

- I am not sure how much information to share when I introduce myself, and also how do I encourage students to introduce themselves?
    - Establishing trust and building students' confidence in your ability can be done striking a balance between your personal, educational, and teaching biography. (https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/first-day-of-class/)
    - Student introductions are often dependent on class size. Students may break into pairs and introduce each other. Try to incorporate the subject matter into the introduction. For example, if teaching a geography course, ask them to also state one place in the world they would most like to visit. Discussion boards online may also be utilized. Do not underestimate the importance of learning student names

Other Resources

Carnegie Mellon University
http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/firstday.html

University of Michigan, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching
http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tsfdc

Stanford University
https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/course-preparation-resources/course-preparation-handbook/preparing-first-class
University of Virginia
http://cte.virginia.edu/resources/teaching-the-first-days/

Vanderbilt University
https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/first-day-of-class/

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References

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Bain, K. (2004). *What the Best College Teachers Do.* Harvard Press.

Bennett , K.L. 2004 . How to start teaching a tough course: Dry organization versus excitement on the first day of class . *College Teaching*: 52, 106

Hermann, A.D. and Foster, D.A. (2008). Fostering approachability and classroom participation during the first day of class: Evidence for a reciprocal interview activity. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 9: 139–51.

Pintrich, P.R. 2004. A conceptual framework for assessing motivation and self-regulated learning in college students. *Educational Psychology Review*, 16: 385–407.